

ITEM:

SUBJECT: City of Visalia, Wastewater Treatment Facility, Tulare County

BOARD ACTION: *Consideration of Renewal of a NPDES Permit*

BACKGROUND: The City of Visalia owns and operates a WWTF that provides sewerage service to the 110,000 residents City of Visalia and the community of Goshen. Disinfected secondary wastewater discharges to evaporation/percolation ponds, an adjacent 900-acres of fiber/fodder crops and walnuts, and to Mill Creek, a water of the United States. WDRs Order No. 97-061 (NPDES Permit No. CA0079189) regulates the discharge of up to 16 mgd. The City has certified an EIR for a WWTF expansion to 20 mgd. The WWTF has been rated at 22 mgd. The proposed Order authorizes discharge of 20 mgd, consistent with flow evaluated under CEQA.

Mill Creek conveys flood releases from Lake Kaweah, and occasionally irrigation supply water from Lake Kaweah or the Friant-Kern Canal. It is a significantly channelized natural creek, with remnants of natural meanders and riparian vegetation along reaches upstream and downstream of the WWTF discharge.

WDRs Order No. 97-061 does not recognize WARM as a beneficial use of Mill Creek. Pursuant to the Basin Plan, Mill Creek is a Valley Floor with WARM and potential REC-1 uses. Therefore, the proposed Order includes several modifications necessary to protect WARM uses and implement Basin Plan water quality objectives. These include chlorine residual limits and interim and final ammonia limits, acute toxicity limits, and whole effluent toxicity monitoring. To ensure compliance with chlorine residual limits, the proposed Order includes a provision with a time schedule that requires the Discharger to dechlorinate its effluent. The proposed Order also includes a provision with a time schedule requiring the Discharger to evaluate the potential impact of ammonia in its effluent on WARM in Mill Creek and, based on the findings of the evaluation, to propose effluent ammonia limits and modifications necessary to comply with the appropriate limits.

The City uses unlined sludge drying beds that may contribute to degradation of underlying groundwater. Past discharges of high EC effluent into onsite disposal ponds have also contributed to degradation of underlying groundwater. Cease and Desist Order No. 97-062 required the City to achieve compliance with its EC limit. Since about June 2000, the City has consistently complied with its EC limit due, in large part, to the closure of an olive processing plant. Groundwater monitoring shows that the groundwater quality has improved since 1998. However sources other than the WWTF, such as nearby dairies, are also contributing to groundwater degradation. The proposed Order contains a provision that requires the Discharger to re-evaluate and expand its groundwater

monitoring network to more accurately characterize the extent and sources of groundwater degradation.

The proposed Order requires the Discharger to conduct a study and propose numeric groundwater limitations consistent with the antidegradation policy and the Basin Plan. Factors to be evaluated by the study include a determination of the types of crops that are or could be grown in the area affected by the WWTF's discharges, and any other potential beneficial uses that may be affected by the discharges.

The proposed Order also requires the Discharger to prepare a facilities plan and to evaluate whether or not the City will continue to discharge into Mill Creek. If the City decides to cease discharging into Mill Creek, several improvements to the WWTF included to protect beneficial uses of the Creek will no longer prove necessary.

ISSUES:

Issues raised by the City resulted in modifications that may have satisfied its concerns and, if any remain, they will be addressed subsequent to agenda preparation. The California Sportfishing Protection Alliance (CalSPA) raised several concerns regarding the proposed Order. CalSPA states that the proposed Order contains an inadequate antidegradation analysis, improperly allows compliance time schedules, improperly uses the SIP to calculate effluent limitations, contains inadequate acute and chronic toxicity limitations, and may not contain adequate disinfection requirements. In response, the proposed Order includes a new finding regarding antidegradation, and a discussion of the antidegradation analysis in the Information Sheet. The time schedules in the proposed Order are authorized by the Basin Plan and consistent with recent case law. Effluent and receiving water toxicity limitations are consistent with previously adopted Orders. In a letter dated 2 August 2006, DHS concurred that treatment and disinfections levels proposed in the Order are adequate.

Mgmt. Review: \_\_\_\_\_

Legal Review: \_\_\_\_\_

20/21 September 2006

Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board  
11020 Sun Center Drive, #200  
Ranch Cordova, CA 95670